

Erasmus Gill House
53 South Market Street
Petersburg
Virginia

HABS NO. VA.-650

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. D. 20240

ERASMUS GILL HOUSE

Location: 53 South Market Street, Petersburg, Virginia

Present Owner: Mrs. Margarethe S. Southworth, 53 South Market Street, Petersburg, Virginia

Present Occupant: Mrs. Margarethe S. Southworth & Miss Josephine S. Emery

Present Use: Private Residence

Statement of Significance: This simple clapboard house, the central portion of which was probably built c. 1785-1791. shows a classic influence in its pediment on the porch. It is particularly noteworthy for its fine interior woodwork, probably added in the early 19th century. This house has been much changed throughout the years.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATIONA. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: c. 1785-1791. It may be maintained, with some degree of certainty, that this house was built between the years of 1785 and 1791--that being the period in which the property was owned by Erasmus Gill. The land books of the Hustings Court of the City of Petersburg do not go back further than 1820. At that time the property was owned by George H. Jones and, on the land book for that year, the following statement is shown, "George H. Jones, 1 pt. #18, Gill's Land Mansion-----Building \$1750.00. Total of land and buildings \$2625.00." In the land book of 1822, when the property was owned by John Stith, it was described and assessed, as follows: "1 pt. #18 Gill's Land, His Mansion." The fact that the earliest land book describes the property as "Gill's Mansion" or "Gill's Land, His Mansion" indicates that Gill probably had it constructed during the time in which he owned the property.
2. Architect: Unknown.
3. Original and subsequent owners: A chain of title for the building follows. Deed Books are in the Clerk's Office of Hustings Court at Petersburg.

1785 Deed September 28, 1785 recorded in
Book 1 page 148
William Wright
to
Erasmus Gill
(property?)

- 1791 Deed March 15, 1791 recorded in
Book 2 page 184
Erasmus Gill
Sarah Gill
to
Harry Heth
- 1798 Deed November 24, 1798 recorded in
Book 2 page 572
Harry Heth
Ann Heth
to
John Morrison
- 1808 Deed April 19, 1808 recorded in
Book 3 page 436
John Morrison
Ann Morrison
to
Robert Lancier
- 1812 Deed July 3, 1812 recorded in
Book 4 page 130
Robert Lancier
Martha T. Lancier
to
John Wright, Jr.
- 1820 Deed October 24, 1820 recorded in
Book 6 page 277
Archibald Baugh
Robert K. Jones
(trustees)
to
John Stith
- 1823 Deed February 4, 1823 recorded in
Book 7 page 113
John Stith
Nancy Stith
to
Thomas Willcox
- 1831 Deed March 12, 1831 recorded in
Book 8 page 352
Thomas Willcox
Elizabeth W. Willcox
to
Archibald G. McIlwaine
- 1882 Deed November 17, 1882 recorded in
Book 8 page 352
Thomas Willcox

Elizabeth W. Willcox
to
Archibald G. McIlwaine

1882 Deed November 17, 1882 recorded in
Book 43 page 391
Richard McIlwaine
ex. of A. G. McIlwaine, tr. for Josephine C. R. Riddle
& her children
to
Robert A. Martin

1898 Deed September 12, 1898 recorded in
Book 61 page 126
John Mann (sub. tr.)
to
Mary M. Schwenck

1968 Deed June 25, 1968 recorded in
Book 291 page 288
Josephine S. Emery
to
Margarethe M. Southworth
(one-half share of property)

4. Original plans and construction: Unknown.

5. Alterations and additions: The two wings may be later additions. The elaborate interior trim may have been installed after the house was built.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Probably the most prominent individual associated with the house was Archibald Graham McIlwaine, who lived here from 1831 until 1881. He was an affluent business man who was interested in various cotton enterprises. A native of Ireland, he came to Petersburg about 1819 and entered upon a successful business career. However, he never allowed his interest in the acquisition of wealth to exceed his interest in religion and education. An active member of the Presbyterian Church, he served for many years on boards of its educational institutions. His possessions included hotel, warehouse, foundry, and railroad interests as well as cotton stocks. ✓

Prepared by Randall J. Biallas
University of Illinois, Urbana
August 1968

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Gill House is a colonial type residence of the late 1700's. It is particularly noteworthy on the exterior for its classic porch. On the interior there is fine woodwork, probably added in the early 19th century.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The house is basically rectangular with projecting wings to north and east, giving it an overall "L" shape. The central portion is 2-1/2 stories plus a basement, while the wings are only one story. This house has been changed and added on to quite extensively, but it seems apparent that the original building only included the central portion, which is approximately 25' x 30'.
2. Foundations: Brick, basement walls partially exposed.
3. Wall construction: Beaded wood siding on timber construction, painted white.
4. Chimneys: Three brick chimneys, one on south side of central portion and two on north wing.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front exterior door has glass side-lights on each side and on top. Other exterior door is of no consequence.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Windows are double-hung, one light per sash. Shutters are all in place.
6. Porches and areaways: The covered front porch is one of the interesting aspects of the exterior. The porch floor is approximately 4' above grade. The porch roof is supported by two free-standing round wood columns and two half round columns acting as pilasters at the face of the wall. An areaway along the front of the house leads to a basement entrance. The porch roof is gabled with an ornate pediment of classical influence with modillions and moulded cornice.
7. Structural system: Jointage at roof and walls was inaccessible due to finish in attic.
8. Roof shape and covering: The central portion has a gabled roof with ridge parallel to the front of the house. The roof of the side wing has a shallower pitch than that of the main house.
9. Cornice, eaves: The cornice along the front wall of the central portion has modillions similar to those on the main

cornice. Overhang is about 16".

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The house has been added onto and changed several times and is therefore probably unlike the original building in plan. The original portion is a side-hall plan, with rooms opening off the hall to the right. The one story wing addition to the left in effect made the first floor into a central-hall plan. The stairway leading to the second floor is at the rear of the hall. The second floor has a small hall with two bedrooms opening off to the south. The basement has been remodeled and consists of several rooms.
2. Stairways: One central stairway leads to the second floor. The stairs to basement are directly under first floor staircase. The newel and stair rail are moulded wood. There is one landing between the first and second floors. A narrow enclosed stairway at the end of the second floor hall leads to the attic.
3. Flooring: Wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: Finishes are primarily painted plaster; some rooms are wall papered. There is wood wainscoting in most rooms on the first floor, including the hall. The basement has some wood paneling. The attic is finished in plaster, walls and ceiling.
5. Doorways and doors: Most appear to be original or to be of very early date. The first doorway to the north in the entry hall has on its north side very ornate detailing on the door frame. It is composed of a fluted pilaster on each side of the door with leaf capitals (probably tobacco) and a projecting cornice. The base is moulded and is an extension of the baseboard.
6. Decorative features and trim: The north front room of the one story wing is a truly beautiful room, and one of its most striking aspects is the north fireplace wall. On each side of the fireplace are arched recesses created by bringing the interior wall in flush with the mantel--thus creating the alcoves of each side. These arches are highly decorative, with pilasters and arch, springing from the capitals of the pilasters. The fireplace is also very handsome with much moulded woodwork and a sun burst design in the center. A cornice extends around the entire room. There are several other interesting fireplace mantels in the house but none quite so ornate.
7. Lighting: Modern.

8. Heating: Gas, floor outlets.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west at the corner of S. Market Street and Lawrence Street. It is in a residential area about 1-1/2 blocks south of the fringe of the downtown commercial district. It is set back about 20' from the street and there is one outbuilding in the rear.
2. Landscaping and walks: A central walk leads to the front steps. The lawn is well groomed and there is a large flowering tree to the north of the front entrance. There is a small 1-1/2' high concrete fence at the sidewalk.

Prepared by John M. McRae
Project Supervisor
Historic American
Buildings Survey
August 1968

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records are part of the documentation made during the 1968 Petersburg Summer Project, undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with The Historic Petersburg Foundation, Inc., with financial assistance from The Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission. During the summer, records were made of twenty-two buildings in the city.

The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief, Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Supervisor was John M. McRae of the University of Florida. The recording team was composed of Randall J. Biallas, historian (University of Illinois, Urbana), and student assistant architects Michael Hamilton (University of Arizona), Thomas J. Sanford (Washington State University), and Edwin S. Smith, Jr. (Rhode Island School of Design). Photographs were made by George Eisenman.